

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER



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The growth of Hampton has accelerated dramatically since World War II. The complexity of our municipal government has increased at an even greater pace. There are many current indications that the growth and complexity of our town is surpassing our planning abilities.

1. Zoning, site plan review and subdivision regulations are modified with increased frequency.
2. The CIP and Master Plan have suddenly become hot topics.
3. Legal disputes involving land use and development, have been more frequent.
4. Management issues more frequently involve technical considerations that can be grasped only by hired consultants.
5. Problems involving pollution, traffic, waste disposal, water supply, flooding and land use are more frequent and more difficult to solve.
6. The need to grasp "the big picture" is becoming dramatically greater, while the number of people able to grasp the big picture (either through long-term residency or technical knowledge) is dwindling.

With these planning issues in mind, the following general recommendations are made.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TOWN PLANNER

Just as Hampton's expanding municipal complexity has resulted in the addition of a town manager to our centuries-old town meeting/selectmen form of government, it is now time to add a town planner to assist our land use boards and code enforcement officers. Hampton is far behind towns of comparable size and growth volume in providing for this function. More importantly, however, Hampton risks its liveability, fiscal soundness and harmony when it becomes bogged down in current crises, neglecting overall planning.

Hampton desperately needs a town planner who is familiar with the history, needs and characteristics of the town, who is capable of coordinating the technical planning issues, and who can work constructively with various land use boards. Since the recommendation for a town planner affects the successful attainment of the goals of all subsequent master plan chapters, the recommendation is made in this introduction.

2. STANDING COMMITTEE FOR CIP/MP UPDATE

1995 saw an extensive effort by the town and the Planning Board to:

- a. Update its 1985 master plan.
- b. Develop a CIP;
- c. Grapple with growth control;
- d. Deal with both sewer and water moratoriums;
- e. Complete the landfill closure;
- f. Grapple with finding and acclimating a new police chief, town manager and recreation director;
- g. Plan school expansions;
- h. Review approximately two dozen proposed zoning changes.

This is clearly too much to do in one year and risks those oversights and errors that occur with trying to do too much too quickly. Long term planning in Hampton needs to be an on-going, organized task rather than a frenetic burst of activity by ad hoc committees. It is therefore recommended that there be a standing committee, made up of planning board members, town planner and other appropriate citizens, which will meet on a regular basis to update the master plan and CIP in a thoughtful and thorough way, chapter by chapter. A metaphor for this activity might be the painting of the Brooklyn Bridge where the painters work continuously as the bridge weathers continuously.

The committee might meet monthly submitting its report to the town and planning board each November.

3. ZONING REGULATION REWRITE

The current Hampton zoning ordinance is at its core a simple code that was implemented by the Town at the dawn of land use regulation, 1949. It has been amended by Town Meeting in 44 of the 46 intervening years. Most years saw multiple amendments of our ordinance. It has become a patchwork of repairs, adjustments, brainstorming and trivia that can be read and understood by only the most dedicated and perseverant land use

junkies. The time is well spent to rewrite the zoning ordinance if only because the disorderly growth of amendments has overwhelmed the original ordinance. This involves bringing better organization and order to the ordinance without changing the essential rules.

An equally important reason for re-examining our ordinance is that the basic 1949 ordinance is, in many ways, inappropriate to the needs of 1995 (not to mention the 21st Century). Many of our zoning districts are anachronisms from the Forties and are now unrelated to the town's best interests, to current transportation systems, to new demographic and land use trends and to regional changes that have occurred since 1949. The General, Business, and Seasonal and Industrial Districts exhibit 1940's expectations that have an odd fit to current reality. Residential Districts also need to be re-examined in the light of population changes and housing alternatives. These latter changes would involve significant alterations of the letter and spirit of our current ordinance and should be made with extreme care and deliberation.

Both the reorganization of our ordinance and the modification of its essential parts need expert technical advice and full citizen input. The process cannot be rushed, however, if the current problems are to be corrected. Care and deliberation will produce an ordinance that can guide the town through the next half century.

4. GROWTH MANAGEMENT

The precipitous growth of Hampton over the past 50 years has affected all aspects of the town and has changed its character dramatically. All of the succeeding chapters of this Master Plan respond in one way or another to the consequences of this growth. Now that the town is faced with the realities of dwindling open space, natural resources and buildable land coupled with escalating costs for services, schools and infrastructure, it is time to confront the issue of growth control directly by regulating the number of building permits issued annually. The update of this Master Plan and the recent adoption of the CIP have provided the statutory pre-requisites for a growth management ordinance, but thorough research and careful drafting are essential.

This sort of growth regulation is not only a minefield of municipal law technicalities, but it can also affect the town's character by subtly encouraging preferred types of growth, as well as regulating its speed. The competition among development interests for available permits, which growth control will foster, becomes an incentive for builders to provide in their development schemes more than the minimum standards set by regulation. Developers can become partners with the town in achieving overall planning

objectives if the prospects for plan approval are linked to the quality of the proposal.

A growth management ordinance in which a limited number of building permits is awarded on the basis of well-defined criteria might place a premium on the quality of proposals. The criteria would include:

- a. Conformity with zoning regulations
- b. Impact on wetlands
- c. Impact on town services
- d. Conformity with Master Plan goals or objectives
- e. Conformity with CIP guidelines
- f. Consistency with regional trends and needs (e.g. regional growth, income distribution and housing type)

Hampton's Past

For 250 years Hampton remained a stable agricultural community. Its harbor, marshes, rich tillable soils, fisheries and timber stands provided a substantial lure to the Town's original settlers and helped sustain a solid agricultural economy until the mid-Nineteenth Century.

The construction of the railroad brought changes to Hampton's economy: both agricultural products and people were more easily transported. The Town's mild and healthy sea breezes became an attraction to city dwellers seeking relief from summer heat, and the production of agricultural products became less of a local necessity. Gradually other industries located in the Town. Near the turn of the century, Hampton decided to make a major municipal commitment to the promise of growth and prosperity in the Twentieth Century. The Hampton Water Works Company was founded, and a trolley line was built connecting Hampton Beach with railway stations in Hampton Center, Exeter, and Amesbury, and the Town leased most of the beach to a consortium of businessmen for the development of a summer resort. Although these events occurred nearly 100 years ago, their effects are very much with us today.

As the beach resort grew, agriculture in Town continued to diminish. The Depression of the 1930's ended farming as a significant source of income in the Town. Farms gradually became woodlands and the beach flourished.

The Second World War heralded further change for the Town. Returning servicemen, anxious to begin a normal life, found in Hampton an attractive environment and land for

new homes was made available by inoperative farms. Jobs could be had throughout the region. The G.I. Bill provided incentives for the construction of affordable house for young families, and Hampton's rapid suburban growth began.

A decade after the beginning of rapid suburban growth, the beach also started to change. Businessmen, suburbanites and commuters began to replace Hampton's traditional residents. The advent of air conditioning, the ease of auto travel on the new federal highway system, changing vacation and employment styles, and general affluence caused Hampton Beach to begin to evolve in the late 50's from a long stay, family oriented, alcohol free resort to a shorter stay entertainment center. In addition, rising construction costs and stricter building codes made it more difficult after the 50's to justify new construction for seasonal use on the beach.

The growth of suburban type subdivisions inland and short stay resort facilities with four season condominiums along the beach continued at an increasingly frenetic pace until the end of the 80's when economic recession occurred. We now find ourselves in the aftermath of that recession and the new trends which will follow have yet to reveal themselves. For this reason, revisers of the Master Plan must avoid projecting patterns and trends of the 70's and 80's into the Twenty First Century. The current review and revision of the Master Plan should be seen as an opportunity to assess what has happened in the past decades and, where appropriate, chart new courses. Hampton has the chance during the present economic intermission to select and promote the best of its future alternatives and to turn away from the undesirable trends.

Future

Until recently, it would have been impossible for a citizen of Hampton to imagine a time in the future when the Town would be developed to its maximum capacity, beyond which it could expand no more. For 300 years municipal growth seemed to follow its own natural course, and land resources were inexhaustible.

Three relatively recent phenomena now make this a very real consideration:

1. Growth of the Town in the last three decades has consumed much of the remaining buildable land and damaged much of our unbuildable land.
2. Water supplies are becoming increasingly stressed and drainage and flooding conditions brought on by development are increasingly problematic.

3. Land use regulation, including zoning, regional planning, master planning and capital improvements planning have provided towns with the tools to control and direct growth, and incentives to formulate a concept for the ultimate character and density of towns.

For the past forty years, Hampton has had a zoning ordinance, and for the last 20 years we've had a Master Plan. The implicit goal of both of these documents until now has been to inhibit change in the town. The enormous changes that have occurred during that time are an indication that our planning documents and zoning ordinances haven't worked as well as hoped. The Town needs a clearer sense of its future, a concept of what the Town will look like when population growth has ended.

Most residents of Hampton today (unlike their predecessors) are convinced that direction less and unregulated growth have huge risks to the livability and the fiscal well being of our Town. Our land use laws can provide the specific regulations, but it is this Master Plan that must provide the direction and goals that give purpose and rationale to the regulations.

The following map of Hampton is an attempt to provide a concept, a broad view of future land use in the Town. It provides in graphic form a general goal or objective toward which our specific land use regulations can aspire. In most ways the conceptual map recognizes patterns of land use that have existed for many decades. The map gives those patterns or trends a realistic but harmonious conclusion that Hampton can look forward to.

Conceptual Town Plan

The plan contains eleven land areas, one of which is the inter-connecting tidal and inland wetlands; the regional transportation routes including I-95, the expressway, Route 1, Route 1A, and the railroad; and the major collector roads including Winnacunnet Road, High Street, Exeter Road, and others. As in past centuries, the shoreline and the intersections of transportation arteries continue to be focuses for development. Residential areas, because they suffer from close proximity to commercial and industrial development, are separated from them.

Area I: low density residential, distant from town facilities, services and utilities.

Area II: office and industry, utilizing regional transportation connections.

- Area III: municipal, educational, and service sector utilizing their geographically central location and proximity to downtown.
- Area IV: pedestrian oriented downtown commercial, utilizing the intersection of local arteries and availability to off coast population density.
- Area V: Auto oriented commercial, located along Route 1, north of Rice Terrace and south of the Expressway.
- Area VI: Off-beach, non-seasonal moderate density residential.
- Area VII: Seasonal Commercial including entertainment and hotels.
- Area VIII: Beach oriented residential, changing from high density seasonal at the southern end to moderate density year round residential at the northern end.
- Area IX: low/moderate density single family residential, downtown oriented.
- Area X: low density single family residential, woods oriented.
- Area XI: interconnecting tidal and inland wetlands.

